

In the book, “Children’s Letters to God: The New Collection”, a little girl named, Nan, writes this letter: “Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I have trouble loving them!”

Last week we learned that God expresses His love for us through His creation, His providence, His incarnation, His discipline and the Holy Spirit’s activity in our lives. Today we are going to look at one more way God reveals His love for us and then we are going to figure out our response to God’s amazing love. The easiest way to see and experience God’s love is through Jesus Christ.

Jesus reveals the nature of God’s love for us

- a. **Jesus’ life** modeled compassion, grace, and truth

If you just study the life of Jesus, you are going to learn about God’s love. People who may not even believe that He was or is the Son of God have taken lessons on love and decency from studying the life of Christ.

So the Word became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son. John 1:14 NLT

Jesus modeled compassion, grace and truth. Just the life of Jesus is enough. He shows us the Father’s love by how He responds to children, by how He feeds people, by how He has compassion on Jairus’ daughter and on the same day heals a woman that has been suffering for 12 years; by how He stops with the widow and raises her son from the dead, and by how He forgives those who were sinners.

- b. **Jesus’ teaching** explained God’s love

He reveals His love by His teaching and He explains Himself in Luke 15. The Pharisees ask, “Why are you hanging out with those sinners and those bad people?” He tells them a parable and He tells them the three familiar stories of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son.

The picture is the father waiting for the son to return to do what? He goes out every day. “Is he here yet? Is he okay?” It’s the picture of someone pursuing and seeking and searching. In the story of the lost sheep the sheep comes back on the shoulders of the searching shepherd and the coin is found and there’s a party and the son returns and there’s life. His teaching told us about the love of God and His death demonstrated the extent of God’s love.

- c. **Jesus’ death** demonstrated the extent of God’s love

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:16 NLT

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8 NIV

Let me make a suggestion to you in regard to trying to understand who God is. You can study and read and learn but sometimes you need to let it all soak in. Maybe a better metaphor is to crockpot it. You know how it works. You put in all the ingredients and the meat and you let it simmer or cook slowly for hours. When it's done after simmering it is generally wonderful.

The question is what will it take to get this truth, the truth of God's love, from our heads to our hearts? There are days when I absolutely don't feel the love of God but the fact is you and I are so bound up by our emotions that it can devastate us if we are not careful. When it comes to dealing with God we believe that He is. He is what He says He is and we believe it by faith not feeling. The devil loves for us to get discouraged and to give up but when we worship through it and trust through it and don't waver through it eventually we reconnect emotionally to the truth and to the presence of God.

An object's value is always determined by the price paid for it. To God, you are worth the price of His Son's death in your place. There's not a lot to add to it. It's a simple fact that God gave His son as a payment for your sins and mine and that because of that we get a shot at eternal life. There's a song that no doubt has been sung somewhere in the almost 96 year history of this church.

When I think of how He came so far from glory
Came to dwell among the lowly such as I
To suffer shame and such disgrace on Mount Calvary
Take my place then I ask myself this question, "Who am I?"

When I'm reminded of His words, I'll leave Him never
If you'll be true I'll give to you, life forever
Oh, I wonder what I could have done to deserve God's only Son
To fight my battles until they're won for who am I?

Who am I that the King would bleed and die for?
Who am I that He would pray not my will, Thine Lord?
The answer I may never know, why He ever loved me so
But to an old rugged cross He'd go, for who am I?

I want to spend the rest of our time looking at our response to God's amazing and incredible love.

How Must We Respond to God's Love?

There are three specific ways to respond.

We must receive His love by faith in our hearts. John 3:16

If you have never received Him I would encourage you today to do it by faith. It's as simple as being sorry for your sins and welcoming Him in to change your life. You invite Him into your life and then you commit to walk in all His ways. It is life changing.

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12

There's another way that is important to respond:

We must believe it by faith in our minds.

And God has given us His Spirit as proof that we live in Him and He in us.¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.¹⁵ All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love. 1 John 4:13-16

How do we do this? How do we know that this is true? Let me give you three specific ways.

1. Saturate your mind in the truth of God's love for you. Romans 8:28-39

I quoted from Romans 8 last week. Go back over the notes of the last few weeks. Do a topical study of an aspect of God's character and you will be amazed how what you put into your minds affects who you are and how you live. Why don't you write these verses out on a 3 x 5 card and carry them around with you for a week and read them often and see what happens.

2. Ask God to help you grasp His love for you. Ephesians 3:14-21

We often have not because we don't ask. God nearly begs us in His word to come to Him and pray. I don't understand it but God longs to hear from us. It may not always feel like it but according to the Bible we really matter to God. This scripture that you see listed here is one that we should probably read a lot until it becomes a reality in our lives.

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father,¹⁵ the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.¹⁶ I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit.¹⁷ Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is.¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Ephesians 3:14-20 NLT

This is the Apostle Paul praying for other Christians and what is he praying? He is praying that they will come to realize God's deep love for them. All of us would act and react differently if we could actually grasp the depth of God's love.

Because we sometimes don't know it or can't feel it, we may be tempted to seek for love in all the wrong places. Ask God, pray for yourself, "Lord, help me grasp that you love me. Lord, I want to even feel it. Lord, help me to take all those messages and false kinds of love and all the baggage that I have and wipe it away. Please help me experience and know your love."

Do you think He'll answer that prayer? You know for sure if it's His will. So you saturate your mind with truth, you ask Him and then third, refuse to seek love in cheap substitutes. This is the woman at the well and it's all of us in here to some degree or another.

3. Refuse to seek love in cheap substitutes.

*Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.*1 John 2:15-17 NLT

Those are the three things that trip everybody up all the time. There is a sensual lust, there's a desire for more stuff and there's a desire for ego to be somebody. What's behind those? What's behind this desire to be loved, to be significant, secure, to matter? They're just cheap substitutes.

It's the world promising you you'll get loved if you do this. You'll get loved if you act like this. You'll get loved if you have this much money. You'll get loved if your body looks like this. You'll get loved if you can serve everybody all the time, be super, super Christian who never says no to anybody and has an absolutely whacked out life, they'll give you all these strokes and it'll feel like love.

They're all cheap substitutes. God says refuse them. What seals the deal is after you receive it and believe it, we must release it by faith through our wills. See, the way you really receive is to give.

We must release it by faith through our wills

We submit our will to God's will and He works through us to change the world.

The command

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples." John 13:34-35 NLT

We are to love others "just as 'Christ' has loved us." In fact this is more than just a command it also a calling.

The calling

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?¹⁸ Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. 1 John 3:16-18 NLT

Man I wish we could grasp this. The call is to action and to back it up with our resources. It's ironic to hear people want to go take a vow of poverty. How about taking a look at your blessings and deciding that maybe you have been blessed to give to others.

The promise

Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. Luke 6:38 NLT

There's a promise. I don't profess to understand this, but when I wilfully choose, whether I feel like it or not, to give my time and give my money and give my gifts and give my attention and give my care to other it creates a spiritual vacuum that only God can fill. And fill it He does according to this promise.

Many of us spend our lives seeking to experience God's love and the catalyst for the action point will be when you stop asking, "Who loves me? Who didn't say hi to me? Am I okay?" and you start asking, "Who needs a friend? Who needs some help? Who needs some love? Who needs a listening ear? Who needs a phone call? Who needs a little money that will never know where it came from?"

This all boils down to be surrendered to Christ. It means simply loving like Jesus. That means in every relationship; at home, at work, at school and in our community. It means you don't get to write people off.

Now let me let you in on a huge secret that's as old as the New Testament. When Jesus challenged His disciples before leaving this earth He said these words:

"Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift He promised, as I told you before.⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

"...⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:4-5, 8 NLT

The disciples waited as instructed and received the power, presence and purity of the Holy Spirit into their lives. The Spirit of God enabled them to love each other and the world around them. In fact Luke wrote about it in Acts 2:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

⁴³ *A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.* ⁴⁴ *And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.* ⁴⁵ *They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.* ⁴⁶ *They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.* Acts 2:42-47 NLT

This weekend around the world many Christians will remember and commemorate this day as Pentecost Sunday. There should be a reason for that, I'll tell you what it should be. It's not about ancient history or trying to be high church, liturgical or even ancient future in our faith. (Pentecost was an Old Testament Jewish Feast of the Weeks event celebrating the giving of the Law) Early Jewish Christians decided to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which was about fifty days after Easter. Now why should we remember it? Glad you asked.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Cor. 3:16

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! ²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there.* ²⁵ *Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.* ²⁶ *Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.* Galatians 5:22-25

I read "This Day with the Master" by Dennis Kinlaw and in this devotional book is the devotional for April 27th. In Ephesians 5:1-2 we are told to "be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love." Here is what Dr. Kinlaw had to say:

"One day as I was reading through the book of Ephesians, I found myself laughing aloud when I came across Ephesians 5:1, "Be imitators of God." How can someone like me imitate God? Many of His attributes immediately came into my mind. First of all, He is the omnipotent One. A few in history have tried to be all-powerful, but they have ended up as fools. Second, He is the omniscient One. He knows all things. But when I am in the process of finding an answer to a question, I discover that I have ten more questions, and so my experience is one of exploding ignorance, not knowledge. The more I know, the more I have to learn. Third, He is the omnipresent One. But I am confined to one moment in time and one point in space. How can I imitate Him? I looked again at the passage: "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and

given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:2) My laughter faded when I realized that God wants us to imitate His lifestyle, not His attributes. What Paul was telling the church to imitate was the life of love that issues in self-sacrifice modeled in the Lord Jesus. Suddenly I found myself confronted not with divine attributes in abstraction, but with the very Cross of Christ. Then I realized that Paul was asking us to imitate the God we see on Calvary, the God who cares more for someone else than He does for Himself. Paul says that the self-sacrificing love pleased the very nostrils of God. But how can I get out of my self-interest, which seems to contaminate everything I do and touch? Paul gives us the key. It lies not in us but in the very love that sent Christ to Calvary. Paul believed that God can put His own love in us, if we want it and seek it. If we let His Spirit fill us, we will find that His love comes with His presence. Then we can live as He lived because He will be living through us.”

May God help us to embrace this life of love and the example of our Savior.